5: Allen H-4 (no date) 1923 RH1 Caucasia RH1

Of these the Kubachins,[1] skilled armourers, the Kurins and the Tabasserans—the two latter tribes probably descendants of Persian colonists—were the most peaceable, industrious and civilised, while the Avars were the most warlike. All the Daghestanli tribes were organised on a patriarchal and extremely democratic basis—the chiefs being elective and controlled by councils of elders. To quote Hanway—"as they live under a kind of republican government, the distinction paid to him (the chief) is not very considerable."[2]

Distinct, racially and politically, from the other mountain tribes were the Ossets, who, divided into four main tribes—Digurins, Tagaurs, Kutatins and Alaghirs—were settled over the southern slopes of the Central Caucasus and in the valley of the Upper Araghva. Their social organisation, with its divisions into classes of nobles and serfs, corresponded in many respects to that of the western tribes.

The mountaineers possessed the accepted characteristics of all semi-civilised peoples: on the one hand reckless courage, extreme generosity, hospitality, loyalty, respect for the aged and love of animals; on the other hand a sensibility to offence and a childish vindictiveness which was expressed in perpetual and blood-thirsty vendettas, extreme personal vanity, a disinclination to submit to discipline or to undertake regular work, cruelty, callousness and violence.

All travellers unite in praising the hospitality of the mountaineers. "They fulfil the duties of hospitality with the most scrupulous attention, and both the host and his guest style one another *conacco*,[3] which is synonymous with *hospes* in Latin. On the departure of the latter, his host escorts him to another lodging, protects him, and, if necessary, risks his own life in defence of his guest. Though it has been observed that robbery is so general in this country that it may be considered as a regular profession, they nevertheless manifest the utmost fidelity to their conacci or guests.[4] Of the Ingushes Klaproth says, "At entertainments the host always waits upon his guests, and eats only what the latter throw him."[5]

The chief occupation and interest of the tribes lay in perpetual raids against their neighbours, or against the inhabitants

[1] Chantre, basing himself on Kubachin legends, suggests that this community was of Greek origin, the descendants of a colony of armourers settled by the Persian Kings at Derbend (Chantre, iv, 228).
[2] Hanway, i. 373.
[3] The Italianised form of "kunakh."
[4] Klaproth, p. 336, Dubois de Montpereux, i, 88, both quoting Interiano.
[5] Klaproth, p. 349.

5: Allen H-4 (no date) 1923 RH1 Caucasia RH1

of the lowlands to the north and south. Spring and autumn were their favourite periods, and much ingenuity was exercised in spying out the land. Fighting was only resorted to in extreme cases; and on the whole we may look upon these raids as merely low-class robbery resorted to for the purpose of obtaining cattle, supplies and slaves, which were either absorbed by the raiders themselves or bartered with other tribes or merchants from other countries.

Some interesting descriptions of their daily life in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries are in existence. By these we learn that in the west their houses were all built of straw or wood. No towers or houses of stone existed, for that would show that the owner was in fear and did not know how to protect himself. They lived mostly on meat, millet, water and mead, and wore long silk or linen tunics with wide trousers tucked into long boots, the whole covered with a cloak of felt, and crowned by a conical cap. They wore long moustaches and shaved their heads, and their arrows, leather work and embroidery were of very fine execution. The eastern tribes, on the other hand, lived in stone fortified villages; their food consisted of barley bread, roots and a little meat, and their weapons included not only guns and spears but wooden shields as well. The Lesghians appear to have been much better off than most of the other tribes, but the Ossets and other Daghestanlis lived often in a condition of great poverty and hardship.

In the history of the religion of the various tribes can be traced the effects of the influence of neighbouring civilisations. The primitive paganism of the tribes, tree, idol and animal worship, survived as a living force until the end of the eighteenth century. On the foundation of this paganism were grafted the various faiths of the different races, who successively invaded or traded with the mountain regions. The Persians introduced fire-worship; the early Georgian Kings propagated Christianity among the Abkhazians, Ossets and Lesghians. Even during the period of Arab hegemony in the Caucasus many districts were Christian which are now fanatically Muhammadan.

The Arabs were successful in converting large portions of Daghestan to Islam, and their influence survives, not only in religious practices but in the writing and the methods of gardening and irrigation used by the eastern tribes.[1]

During the Middle Ages Christianity was spread by the Bagratids among the Kabardans and Chechens, and in the

[1] Chantre, iv, 218.

[i.e., of the caucasian mountain tribes--Analyst]

5: Allen H-4 (no date) 1923 RH1 Caucasia RH1

the towns of Akhaltsikh, Akhalkalaki and Khertvis; and advanced as far as Erzerum and Baiburt. By the Treaty of Adrianople (1828) Russia remained in possession of Anapa, and all Guria and the Pashalik of Akhaltsikh.

Thus, in three-quarters of a century of war the Russian frontiers had been advanced from the Kuban and the Terek to the Chorokh and the Araxes, and she came into the possession of a territory whose economic possibilities had yet to be realised and whose strategic position gave to her the opportunity of dominating the policies both of Persia and of Turkey.

IV

THE MOUNTAIN WAR (1816–1864)

DURING the thirty years in which the conquest of Transcaucasia was in process, the Russians were engaged simultaneously in organising the vast territories in the North Caucasus which had come under their rule through the gradual settlement of Cossack bands, the expulsion of the native nomad tribes, and the exclusion of the Turks. Until the middle of the eighteenth century the Cossacks of the Terek had been virtually independent and associated freely with the native tribes, with whom they came into conflict in mutual raids, but with whom their relations were no more hostile than were those of the tribes with each other. But as the power of the central authority increased, the dividing line between the Cossacks and the Caucasian tribes became more distinct. On the one hand the Cossacks were organised into *voiskos* or military divisions, and in 1816 forfeited the right of electing their own *atamans*. On the other hand the native tribes, who had fraternised with the free Cossack communities, regarded with suspicion that Muscovite Government which had treated with such harshness the Lowland Tatars and which seemed determined to check the raiding expeditions which had been their occupation for centuries.

Further, the Turkish wars and the constant propaganda of Mussulman mullahs tended to accentuate their distrust and to arouse their fanaticism. The continued independence and hostility of the mountaineers were intolerable to the Russian Government. On the one hand the raids of the mountaineers caused considerable harm to the prosperity of the colonists;

5: Allen H-4 (no date) 1923 RHI Caucasia RH1

on the other the military power of the tribes was a constant menace to the difficult line of communications with Transcaucasia, a menace the more dangerous when considered in conjunction with the friendly relations between the mountaineers and the Turks, and the latter's naval control of the Black Sea. In 1816 therefore, when Yermolov became Viceroy of the Caucasus, Russia's military obligations in Europe and in Persia being for the moment eased, it was decided to undertake the reduction of the mountain tribes.

The operations[1] which extended along the whole length of the Cossack Line, a length of over 450 miles, were divided into three groups. On the right flank, the Cherkesses and Abkhazians were to be attacked; on the centre, the Kabards and Ossets; on the left flank the Chechens and the tribes of Daghestan. Of these three groups, the task allotted to the troops on the left flank was the most difficult. The western tribes though brave were not numerous; their strength had been sapped by a plague originally introduced by Turkish sailors, while the central tribes, Kabards and Ossets, had already received some severe lessons and gave little further trouble. The Chechen tribes, however, were numerous and capable guerrilla fighters, while the thick forests covering their hills made difficult any general advance. Daghestan presented still more formidable obstacles. The area inhabited by the troublesome tribes consisted, as we have seen, of a narrow strip of littoral along the Caspian coast and an elevated table-land, through which a large number of streams had cut channels of a great depth, the whole rising south and west to lofty mountain chains, with several peaks of over 13,000 feet in height. The Lesghians, further, were the most numerous—at the beginning of the war they are estimated to have numbered nearly 2,000,000—and the most highly organised of all the tribes. And when threatened by superior forces, they would retire into their *auls* or fortified villages, situated on the most inaccessible parts of the mountains. These villages were so placed that the artillery of those days could seldom be brought to bear with effect on them, and their capture was only possible by storm—" a formidable business when every individual house has its garrison of desperate men, and still more desperate women. . . . The houses were of stone, two stories high; . . . they were disposed, as far as possible, amphitheatre-wise, so as to enfilade one another, the streets being tortuous and barely wide enough for two horsemen to ride abreast; straddled, too, in places by a house furnished

[1] [i.e., in the Mountain War of 1816-64; see cat 116, p 199 -- Analyst]